

Hearings on Religious Persecution in Sudan: Professor John Voll Oral Testimony

February 15, 2000

(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)

PROFESSOR VOLL: Thank you very much.

It is a real pleasure to be here and to be able to be back. I wish the occasion for my being back was that somehow, there had been a dramatic change, and we could all be rejoicing in the end of a horrible war and in a transformation of a horrible situation.

When last I was before the Commission, I spoke about a number of things, and many of those things have not yet changed. Religious freedom in terms of the primary interest of the Commission is suppressed and challenged in the Sudan. There are significant and gross abuses of human rights in the country. There is a wide range of problems of economic and food distribution and a variety of other really serious problems.

There are many different things that can be done to talk about that situation. I don't think we need a lot of description of it, but rather, what I would like to bring to the Commission's attention are three basic points which I try to make in my written testimony.

These serious problems simply will not come to an end unless the current war is brought to an end. The relatively gloomy/optimistic kind of position of a week ago in The Washington Post that finished by saying that "Sanctions can be lifted only when war and the sponsorship of terrorism both come to an end in the Sudan," assumes that the starting process is someplace else, and that the end is going to be the end of the war. For resolution of the problems of slavery, for resolution of the problems of famine, for resolution of the problems of starvation and religious freedom, suppression and so on, the starting point for finding resolution to those problems is an end to the civil war.

The second point that I would like to make as strongly as I possibly can is that despite wishful thinking, I have spent 40 years looking at the Sudan. I first arrived in the Sudan early

in 1960, and from that point on down to now, I have heard people telling me: Oh, my side is just around the corner from its victory.

This is not a war that any side is going to win. It is going to have to be a war that will be brought to an end by negotiation, mediation, and a settlement that will include all of the people who are in the country.

The third point is that that resolution probably cannot be completed simply by the parties themselves acting. They need outside friends, just as has been needed in Sudan and other conflict areas in the world, they need outside friends who can help to work toward a resolution of the conflict.

But here, especially in terms of the United States, I can do no better than I do in my written testimony, quoting Peter Bell of C.A.R.E. USA: In getting to this kind of a resolution, what is needed is a unified and engaged U.S. policy in pursuit of a just peace, a plan that encompasses the views of all parties within Sudan. U.S. policymakers should emulate former President Carter's example in negotiating in Uganda by turning away from strategies that reward warriors and toward policies that support peacemakers. It should also be very clear that for someone to be an honest broker, you cannot be identified with one side in the dispute. So there will have to be outside help, but that outside help will have to be the kind that represents an openness to talking to and an ability to negotiate with all the parties in the conflict.

The final thing is that there is one difference between now and last August when I talked to the Commission. That is that there has been--and I look forward to hearing more about this--there has been a kind of reshuffling; there has been a kind of change that has provided opportunities, I think, for greater flexibility on the part of Sudanese actors, the Sudanese Government or the factions in the Sudanese Government, and among the other parties involved.

The Economist at the end of last month had an article entitled, "Sudan's Chance for Peace." They weren't very optimistic. They said that finding a solution will be very difficult. But I think that within the framework of recognizing that if we want to solve the grave problems of the Sudan, we have to bring the war to an end--but that war is a war that cannot be militarily won; it has to come to a negotiated settlement. And the United States and other friends of the Sudanese will have to play an important role in bringing that resolution about.

Thank you.